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ABSTRACT

School districts in the Education Service Center, Region 2, (southern Texas) were surveyed to examine procedures the districts have put in place to identify threats of violence to school safety and security. The target population was 47 school districts. Data collection was done using mailed questionnaires with a simple yes/no answer format. Twenty-eight schools completed and returned questionnaires. Data are presented in a narrative, tabular format. Survey results show that planning is of the utmost importance and must include every level of community. Communication among all parties involved is vital to carrying out plans and keeping chaos and stress to a minimum. Proactive measures include a variety of surveillance programs, standardized dress, closed-campus policies, and anger management and conflict resolution in curricula. Recommendations include doing a replicate study using a larger population, establishing a lobby to promote and seek school-safety legislation, and placing greater emphasis on educating future school personnel about school violence at the university level. The report concludes with 45 references and 4 appendices containing a list of principles to help avoid misinterpretation of early warning signs of violence, a list of early warning signs, letters and forms for permission to survey and perform the follow-up study, and the survey questionnaire. (RT)

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School Safety and Violence

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SCHOOL SAFETY AND VIOLENCE

Sandra Herrera, Lana Holland, and Suzanne Wesson

The purpose of the study is designed to examine procedures that school districts in the Education Service Center, Region 2 have in place to identify threats of violence to school safety and security.

The researchers' references provide insight into the plans available to prevent or react to acts of school violence. The study is significant in that recent tragedies suffered in schools and communities across the nation are more frequent and more violent. This particular study measures the readiness of school districts in Region 2 regarding both proactive and reactive plans for school violence.

The target population included 47 school districts in the Education Service Center Region 2 area with Safe and Drug Free Schools representatives. The sample was a purposive sample.

. The instrument was a 15-question survey with Yes/No responses. It was pre-tested among administrators in a large urban district and a small rural district The respondents were asked to complete their responses and mail the completed survey in the addressed, stamped envelope.

The data were collected, analyzed, calculated in percentages, and presented in a narrative, tabular format.

The results indicate that 89% of school districts responding have proactive plans relating to school violence prevention. Fifty seven percent of school disticts responding did an annual review of the plan. Fifty nine percent of school districts responding have written or revised their emergency/crisis plan in the last three years. Sixty one percent of school districts coordinated with law enforcement or security guards concerning their emergency/crisis plans.One conclusion reached is that districts are using training and the dissemination of information to enable staff to identify indicators of potential school violence. The data shows that the most common actions taken by Region 2 school districts were institution of dress code, presentations by, and presence of, law enforcement officers, and checks of bookbags, lockers, etc. The least common actions were the use of metal detectors, hotlines, and ID badges.

Fifty percent of school districts in Region 2 have law enforcement or security on their campuses. Attempts through professional development are being made to educate teachers, staff members, and law enforcement personnel in regard to identifying characteristics students may display as indicators of possible violent behavior.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1—INTRODUCTION 1
Statement of the Problem 2
Statement of the Purpose 3
Limitations of the Study 4
Significance of the Study 4
Definition of Terms 4
CHAPTER 2--REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 6
Definition of School Violence 6
Early Warning Signs 8
Proactive Approaches 10
Police Involvement 10
Reaction Readiness 11
CHAPTER 3--METHODOLOGY 16
Introduction 16
Research Design 16
Sample 16
Instrumentation 16
Data Collection 17
Data Analysis 17
CHAPTER 4--RESULTS 18
Data Analysis 18
Research Question 1 19
Research Question 2 20
Research Question 3 23
CHAPTER 5--SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS 25
Summary 25
Conclusions 26
Recommendations 28

REFERENCES **29**

APPENDIX A **33**

APPENDIX B **34**

APPENDIX C **37**

APPENDIX D **38**

School Violence Prevention

Chapter 1--Introduction

As local and national events in the last several years have demonstrated, there are life and death issues which dramatically impact public school students on a daily basis. As a result, the seventh goal of the National Education Goals states that by the year 2000, "All schools in America will be free of drugs and violence and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol, and offer a disciplined environment that is conducive to learning." To accomplish this goal, the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1994 provides for support of drug and violence prevention programs. The Act includes an impact evaluation component which contains a provision requiring the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to collect data to determine the frequency, seriousness, and incidents of violence in elementary and secondary schools (U. S. Department of Education, 2000).

During the 1999-2000 school year there have been several incidents of violence, many of which resulted in the death of students. These deaths can be termed "school-associated violent deaths" because they include homicide, suicide, or weapons-related violent deaths that occur on school property, on the way to or from school, and at school-sponsored activities (NSSC, 2000). The National School Safety Center reports that the following school associated violent deaths have occurred during the 1999-2000 school year:

- Amanda Gaylynne Tanquary, 16, shot herself in the school parking lot.
- Marcos Sarabia, 16, shot himself in the boys' locker room.
- Jonathan Leggitt, 17, beaten to death in the school's cafeteria.
- Ted Niziol, 16, accidentally shot by a friend who bragged that he had brought a gun to school.
- Kayla Rolland, 6, shot in a classroom by another student for an unknown reason.
- Ramon Kimble, 16, shot after school during a random act of violence.

Statement of the Problem

Nationally, violence remains the second leading cause of death for Americans aged 15 to 24 (NSSC, 2000). While Texas has not yet experienced a school shooting similar to incidents in other states, including the recent tragedy in Littleton, Colorado, Texas schools are still subject to violence and weapon possession. As Carole Keeton Rylander, Texas Comptroller (2000), reports, during the 1996-1997 school year, there were nearly 9,000 reported incidents of gang-related school violence on Texas campuses. During the same year, schools reported more than 45,000 students and nearly 4,000 teachers assaulted. In addition, more than 500 guns and nearly 8,000 knives and other weapons were confiscated from students across Texas.

Efforts toward preparing youth to successfully handle the complexities of today's society and to enhance their self-confidence, motivation, and self-worth must be a priority for the leadership in Texas school districts (Verdugo, 1998). Section 21.451 of the Texas Education Code states that teachers must be provided training in conflict resolution and discipline strategies, though each school district in the State determines what type of training will be provided. Some experts say that long-term solutions to

curbing school violence should focus on teaching students how to manage their feelings. Research indicates that success in life is tied not only to intelligence and academic ability, but more often to characteristics of emotional development, like getting along with others. As young people are in the process of learning these life-long skills, the National School Safety Center maintains that all schools should have a school safety plan. Although Texas school districts are required to have a plan to address school violence at the district level, Section 11.253 of the Education Code does not require each campus to develop a school violence plan. The literature does not indicate the degree to which school districts in Texas have addressed the issue of school violence.

Statement of the Purpose

The study was designed to examine procedures that school districts in the Education Service Center, Region 2 have in place to identify threats of violence to school safety and security. The research was guided by the following three questions:

1. Can school personnel identify characteristics and traits of students that are indicators of school violence?
2. What are school districts in Region 2 doing to prevent school violence?
3. What plans do school districts in Region 2 have in place in the event of an act of violence?

Limitations of the Study

The study may produce limited information due to the sample size being small. The cross sectional survey produces data that is obtained at one time and may not be accurate at a different point in time.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant in that recent tragedies suffered in schools and communities across the nation are more frequent and more violent. School violence is a current issue that is receiving constant media attention. This particular study measures the readiness of school districts in Region 2 regarding both proactive and reactive plans for school violence.

Definition of Terms

Dress Code: A statement of policy that specifies clothing that may be worn; it also describes clothing and accessories that are prohibited.

Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act 1994 (SDFSC): A Federally funded Title IV Program. Federal government's primary vehicle for reducing drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, and violence, through education and prevention activities in our nations' schools.

School Safety Plan: Policies and practices that aim to assist school personnel in providing a safe learning environment for students and staff.

School Violence: The endangerment of students and staff at school, or school related events, through aggression, conflict, delinquency, conduct disorders, criminal behavior, antisocial behavior, or assault.

Standardized Dress: A dress code that narrowly limits the style, color and accessories that students may wear. For example, only polo style shirts may be worn and they must be either navy blue, white or gray.

Uniform Dress: Every student in the school is required to wear the same type, color and style of clothing. Usually accessories are prohibited.

Violent Acts: Destructive acts, physical fights, gang violence, victimization from acts of aggression by both students and persons at school or school related events.

Chapter 2--Review of the Literature

In recent years, the morals (Bairu, 2000) of students has come under the intense scrutiny of the public because of the severe and devastating events that have occurred at the close of the twentieth century. These events include, but are not limited to, such things as bullying, extortion and murder (NSSC, 2000). In this discussion, school violence will center on the most violent and severe occurrences that take place in public schools. However, it must be remembered that school violence is actually on a continuum of behavior extending from primary grades to high school.

Definition of School Violence

In defining school violence, the concept must be considered along the aforementioned continuum of behavior within a developmental framework. For example, violent behavior for young elementary school children primarily consists of aggressive behaviors such as kicking, hitting, spitting, or name calling. As children grow older, the behavior becomes more serious, characterized by bullying, extortion, and physical fighting (Bairu, 2000). Aggressive or violent adolescents may engage in assault against other students and staff, sexual harassment, gang activity, or the carrying of unauthorized weapons (NSSC). The term school crime has also been used to define different types of criminal behavior at school including theft, property offenses, and vandalism (Goldstein, Apter, & Hartoonunian, 1984). Others define school violence as conflict between students and teachers (Curcio & First; Steinberg, 1993), or as activities that cause suspensions and disciplinary contacts or detentions. Studies of school violence have variously used such terms as aggression, conflict, delinquency, conduct disorders,

criminal behavior, antisocial behavior, and violence, among others, to describe this class of problem behaviors (Cornell, 2000).

Though limiting the focus of this report to serious acts of violence does not fully capture the nature and extent of school crime and victimization (Hanke, 1996) it is a life-threatening and irrevocable event that has permanent effects and therefore begs to be an entity by itself. People are disturbed by increasing rates of school-based homicides (Kachur, et., al., 1996), even though these occurrences constitute a relatively small proportion of incidents at school compared to property crimes, acts of assault or extortion, and threats of physical harm. Threats may occur frequently at school but may or may not be actually carried out on school grounds. For the majority of students, the important issue may be less one of violent personal attack and more one of stolen property and threats that color their perceptions and induce anxiety and fear while in school (Hanke, 1996). Nonetheless, even though school-based homicides are not common, they are acute and life-changing events. Of course, as Barrett (1999) suggests, witnessing acts of violence, in addition to being personally victimized by violence, can also cause students to be fearful and anxious, affect a student's willingness to attend school, and impact on a child's ability to learn and be socialized at school. The most important criterion of school violence being considered along a developmental continuum is that it permits an examination of how different forms of violent exposure and victimization affect children at various ages, grades, and different developmental levels, and those challenged to perform various developmental tasks. These issues are essential to consider for implementation and evaluation of school-based prevention programs.

Therefore, educators must be cognizant of the characteristics of a student who has the potential for violent behavior (Hill and Drolet, 1999).

Early Warning Signs

As reported by the National Safe School Center, the issue of school safety has always been a fundamental issue to students, parents, educators and the public at large. However, it has taken on a new urgency with the excessive forms of violence that have been occurring in public schools particularly in the last decade. This violence is particularly shocking because it is random, senseless and occurs without much forewarning, particularly if educators and parents are oblivious to the warning signs (NSSC, 2000). The Department of Education and the Department of Justice have developed a guide entitled, "Early Warning, Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools" (1999) which contains a section discussing early signs that a student might display before a violent act is committed. There are certain behavioral and emotional signs that, when viewed in context, can signal a troubled child. These early warning signs must stay in the realm of indicators that a student needs help.

Such indicators may or may not indicate a serious problem; nor do they necessarily mean that a child is prone to violence toward self or others. Rather, early warning signs provide an impetus to peruse any concerns and address the child's needs (U. S. Department of Education, 2000). One pitfall, however, is that adults may inappropriately label or stigmatize individual students because they appear to fit a specific profile or set of early warning indicators. Teachers and administrators are not professionally trained to analyze children's feelings and motives but they are on the front

line when it comes to observing troublesome behavior and making referrals to appropriate professionals, such as school psychologists, social workers, counselors, and nurses. They also play a significant role in responding to diagnostic information provided by specialists. Thus, it is no surprise that the U. S. Department of Education promotes effective schools as ones that take special care in training the entire school community to understand and identify early warning signs. As such researchers as Boschee (1996), Hill and Drolet (1999) and Maag (1995) have discovered, educators and families can increase their ability to recognize early warning signs by establishing close, caring, and supportive relationships with children and youth.

Unfortunately, there is a real danger that early warning signs will be misinterpreted. Educators and parents can ensure that the early warning signs are not misinterpreted by using several significant principles to better understand them. To view a list of these principles see appendix A.

It is not always possible to predict behavior that will lead to violence. However, educators and parents can recognize certain early warning signs. In some situations and for some youth, different combinations of events, behaviors, and emotions may lead to aggressive rage or violent behavior toward self or others. A good rule of thumb is to assume that these warning signs, especially when they are presented in combination, indicate a need for further analysis to determine an appropriate intervention (U. S. Department of Education, 2000).

Proactive Approaches

There is no single answer as to why students commit acts of violence, nor is there a single solution to the problem of school violence. There is one inescapable truth, however, and that is that schools play an important part of preventing school violence and they should not avoid their responsibility in addressing this critical issue. As a result, many school districts have adopted proactive plans in dealing with school violence. Among the school districts across the U.S. that have implemented proactive measures are the Long Beach (California) Independent School District and the Norfolk (Virginia). Both school districts require uniforms at the middle school level and each has seen a drop in the number of violent acts: At Long Beach I.S.D overall school crime decreased by 36 percent; at Norfolk I.S.D. fighting has decreased by 38 percent.

There is a plethora of proactive measures being implemented by school districts. Some districts conduct search such as metal detector searches, locker searches, and canine "sniff" searches. Though there is little or no data to substantiate the benefits of these measures, all indications point to the prevention of violence at school.

Police Involvement

In *New Jersey v. T.L.O.*, the Supreme Court approved a more lenient standard for searches conducted by school officials on school grounds. With the increasing presence of law enforcement personnel at school, principals will naturally call upon uniformed officers to assist in searches for suspected weapons and drugs on campus. Court decisions in this area indicate that the constitutionality of these searches will depend on the degree of police involvement in the investigation and in the decision to search. Overall, the courts tend to uphold searches where the police do not primarily conduct the

investigation or direct or encourage school authorities to initiate a search. In the event that a police officer is the instigator of the interrogation and search, then the interrogation may be considered custodial and the officer will have to show probable cause for the search and provide the student with *Miranda* warnings.

Across America school violence occurs daily in one form or another. Educators are implementing measures that do not make violent acts appropriate in school settings. However, if educators can identify characteristics of potential violent perpetrators and can intervene in a timely fashion, the evidence seems to support the idea that violence can be lessened and perhaps eliminated.

Reaction Readiness

The inclusion of students and community as stakeholders in school violence prevention planning should not be overlooked. Beginning in 1995, the Youth for Justice program, an affiliation of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) holds annual youth summits across the United States. In 1995, approximately 11,000 persons participated in youth summits across the country; of those, 80% were students, 10% were teachers, 2% were administrators, and 8% were other adults. The models used in many states include pre-summit activities for students and/or teachers, including law-related education lessons, surveys, background research, and assignments focusing on youth violence. During many summits students are asked to develop "action plans" to prevent violence in their schools and communities. Follow-up summit activities include service-learning projects, school-based summits, and reports. The inclusion of the students, teachers, and other adults is an important link in the successful

implementation of any violence prevention plan (Leiterman and Nessel, 1999). Schools function within broader communities. Participation from civic organizations, business partners, law enforcement, social service agencies and juvenile justice authorities can share information with schools regarding youth crime, systems for measuring the levels of violence, sources of funding, volunteers, learning opportunities and materials and services and programs available for youth. Collaborating to build a strong partnership allows for the greatest use of resources and the sharing of responsibilities and accomplishments (DOE and DOJ, 1998).

The Educational Research Service in 1998 conducted a study of more than 1,200 schools throughout the nation. The study found that 21 percent of high schools, 19 percent of middle level schools, and 4 percent of elementary schools reported experiencing one or more serious crimes, defined as murder, rape or other sexual assault, physical assault with a weapon, suicide, or robbery. As schools and school districts begin the work of violence prevention it is important that they have a comprehensive school safety/violence prevention plan (Webb, 2000).

The current literature indicates that violence prevention planning is of the utmost importance. The National School Safety and Security Services President, Kenneth Trump, testified before the United States Senate committee on Health, Education Labor, and Pensions at its hearing on school safety. The focus of the presentation was on how school security and crisis preparedness can be improved. Districts that fail during a crisis usually do so because they haven't developed a specific plan or anticipated all the things that need to be done to handle crisis (McDaniel, 1999).

In Texas, the Texas Education Agency is training public school administrators in crisis management and violence prevention planning. State professional organizations such as Texas Association of Secondary School Principals, Texas Association of Elementary School Principals, and Texas Association of School Boards are addressing violence in schools at their state conferences. Education Service Centers are offering training through the Federal Safe and Drug Free Schools Program.

Professional organizations have devoted entire publications to proactive and reactive measures in the case of school violence. The *Texas Lone Star*, *The Phi Delta Kappan* and NASSP bulletins have published editions of their journals within the last twelve months specifically focusing on dangerous schools, crisis management and school violence prevention planning. These publications have provided steps in the development and implementation of a school violence prevention plan. In addition to guidelines in developing plans, questionnaires for students, staff and law enforcement are available, as well checklists and worksheets regarding climate and physical environment evaluation.

While much of the literature indicates the plan as the most important point in handling school violence, it is the communication of the plan that must happen to actually protect students and staff. While actual studies were not found to support this, articles and publications address the importance of having a plan. In *The Texas Lone Star*, Victoria Independent School District Risk Manager, Robert Bookout emphasizes the importance of the written plan. Bookout states, "Panic tends to set in. That's why you have your manual, and that's why you practice your procedures. But you have to stay

calm. The worst thing you can do is to not sit down and use your common sense. You start being reactive rather than proactive." (White, 1999).

Protecting students and staff takes time, planning, and practice. Schools are no longer the safe-havens they once were. In an attempt to prepare for an act of violence, school administrators must walk a fine line, and an often political line, between providing for a worst case scenario, and inciting too much fear in the students and community. Establishing set sounds, sirens indicate a bomb threat, three bells indicate an intruder in the building, or the fire alarm for evacuation is a quick and effective way to communicate to the entire population what type of event is occurring. In the case of three bells ringing, students would know to get inside a classroom area and teachers would know to keep students inside and lock their doors. Mandating the performing of safety drills, not just fire drills, would be advisable to achieve the quick reaction necessary to move students and staff into the safest areas (Walker and Walker, 2000).

Law enforcement presence on campuses and at school related events are increasing. According to the 1998 Annual Report on School Safety, public schools reported that they used a number of measures to increase security. Six percent of public schools had police or other law enforcement representatives stationed 30 hours per week or more at the school in a typical week during the 1996-97 school year. One percent of public schools stationed law enforcement personnel from 10-29 hours per week, and three percent had them stationed from one to nine hours per week. The same report states that during 1996-97 10% of public schools reported at least one serious crime to the police, 47% reported at least one less serious or nonviolent crime to police, and 43% reported no crime activities to police. By instructional level, crimes reported to police

were 78% in high schools, 72% in middle schools, and 42% in elementary schools (DOE and DOJ, 1998). Walker and Walker (2000) write that locked doors and uniformed officers may make the school more secure but will probably do little to make individual students feel safe. The presence of law enforcement on campuses is one measure in preventing school violence. Focusing on students and their behaviors and their education is a vital measure that can not be overlooked.

Chapter 3--Methodology

Introduction

The contents of this chapter include the following divisions: Introduction, Research Design, Sample, Instrumentation, Data Collection, and Data Analysis.

Research Design

A cross-sectional survey was used to collect the data. The survey is a descriptive research model. The advantage of a cross-sectional survey research design is that all data is collected at one time. A weakness of the design is that the data represents only a single point in time. The results could be different if the data were collected at a different point in time.

Sample

The sample was a purposive sample. The target population included 47 school districts in the Education Service Center Region 2 area with Safe and Drug Free Schools representatives. The accessible population was limited to 28 school districts whose superintendent granted permission for their district representative to be surveyed. Surveys were mailed to respondents with stamped envelopes enclosed. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire by bubbling Yes or No responses to each of the 15 questions. All 28 districts whose Superintendents granted permission to survey returned a completed survey for the study.

Instrumentation

The instrument was a fifteen item questionnaire develop from a review of the literature. It was pre-tested among administrators in a large urban district and a small rural district. The introductory letters sent to the district superintendent and the district

Safe and Drug-Free representative were on Texas A& M University--Corpus Christi letterhead. The survey instrument was printed on white paper with black print. The length of the questionnaire was two pages and contained 15 questions. This type of survey was chosen so that those surveyed would be most likely to complete a Yes/No survey, and it was also selected in the interest of efficiency of time, both for the respondents and the researchers. The survey was written in an easy-to-read, and easy-to-respond, format. The respondents were asked to bubble their responses and mail the completed survey in the addressed, stamped envelope.

Data Collection

The permission to survey letter, a separate page to grant or deny permission to survey, a copy of the instrument, and an addressed, stamped envelope was mailed to each of the 47 superintendents (See Appendix C). Upon return of the Superintendent's permission form, by return mail the instrument was mailed to each district representative. After 14 days, any district that had not returned the completed permission form was faxed a follow-up letter (See Appendix D) and the same permission form. Superintendents were asked to return by fax or mail the original document sent. A total of 28 districts returned the completed surveys.

Data Analysis

The data was hand tabulated and data analysis was through percentages of the number of responses. Analysis will also be conducted by comparing the number of Yes responses to the number of No responses.

Chapter 4--Results

Data Analysis

The purpose of the research study was to determine whether the schools in Region 2 were taking initiatives toward the prevention of school violence, what plans districts in Region 2 have in place, and whether school personnel could identify characteristics and traits that students may display that could potentially provide an indication that students may engage in a violent act at school.

The research questions to be studied were:

1. Can school personnel identify characteristics and traits of students that were indicators of school violence?
2. What are school districts in Region 2 doing to prevent school violence?
3. What plans do school districts in Region 2 have in place in the event of an act of violence?

The survey used to study the questions was administered to a purposive sample. It was given to the Safe and Drug Free Schools contact representative for each district in Region 2. The sample was chosen not because it was representative of the target population, but because the members were knowledgeable in regard to their school safety procedures, policies, and initiatives. Twenty-eight of the forty-seven school district representatives responded to the fifteen-question survey document. The percentage of representatives that responded was 59.5%.

Research Question 1

- **Can school personnel identify characteristics and traits of students that are indicators of school violence?**

The total percentages of the district's responses indicating the use of presentations about violence prevention programs, staff training, review of discipline policies, and instruction for students and teachers is indicated in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Training for Personnel Involving School Violence		
	Yes	**No**
Teachers participating in violence prevention programs	64%	36%
Review of student discipline problems, policies, etc.	86%	14%
Provide instruction for students/ teachers in conflict resolution	54%	46%
(n=28)		

The data collected from the survey in regard to the staff development for school personnel indicated that 64% of the districts' teachers participated in a violence prevention program to effectively handle or reduce violence in schools. Of the schools surveyed, 86% did have an annual review of student discipline problems. Staff development and reviews of the discipline problem issues would give the faculty and staff members the knowledge needed to identify potential problems. Only 54% of the districts indicated that the students and teachers were provided with instruction in conflict resolution. Instruction involving the use of conflict resolution according to the review of literature can be used effectively to reduce and prevent school violence.

The conclusion reached is that districts are using training and the dissemination of information to enable staff to identify indicators of potential school violence.

Research Question 2

- **What are school districts in Region 2 doing to prevent school violence?**

The responses to the questions regarding what initiatives school districts are currently using were quite interesting and gave a clear presentation of the measures school districts currently have in place. Table 2 below shows the percentages for districts that responded to the survey questions involving preventative measures.

Table 2

Preventative Actions Used by Region 2 Districts

	Yes	No
Law enforcement officers talking to classes	86%	11%
Instituted a dress code or ban on certain types of clothing	100%	0%
Placed monitors in the hallways	54%	46%
Stationed police officers in or around the school	50%	50%
Made checks of bookbags, backpacks or lockers	75%	25%
Hired security guards in or around the school	46%	54%
Provided hotlines for students to call	11%	89%
Used handheld metal detectors	21%	79%
Made students walk through metal detectors	0%	96%
Used student/teacher/visitor ID badges	39%	61%

(n=28)

The schools surveyed indicated by an 86% response that visitors such as law enforcement officers talked to classes about crime and violence. All of the schools responded with a yes answer indicating they have instituted a dress code or banned certain types of clothing. The response of 100% on the dress code issue was only one of three 100% responses on the entire survey. Obviously, this large percentage indicates a commonality regarding the importance of the standards for students' attire. Dress codes and/or standardized dress are a relevant issue that schools are currently addressing. The responses from the schools indicated that 54% used monitors, meaning that school personnel are placed in the hallways to monitor student behavior. Half the districts reported that campus police officers were stationed in or around the school. Of the districts surveyed, 46% had hired security officers and stationed the officers in or around the campuses and 54% had not hired security officers. The districts indicated 75% of the campuses were using random checks of bookbags, backpacks and lockers. Only 11% indicated that their district used a student hotline, 21% reported that their districts used handheld metal detectors, and 4% use walk through metal detectors. Only 39% of the responses indicated that campuses used student/teacher/visitor ID badges for identification purposes.

The conclusion reached, based upon the results of this portion of the survey, indicate dress codes and random bookbag and backpack searches are used on most campuses to aid in the prevention of school violence. There is also an indication that law enforcement and security officers being placed in or around the campuses are being used to an extent, and schools are using officers to try to relay messages about violence and

safety to the students via presentations. The most restrictive techniques such as metal detectors were least likely to be used by the districts surveyed.

Communication with all school staff is a vital component in crisis preparedness as indicated in the following table:

Table 3

Information Provided for Personnel Involving School Violence	**Yes**	**No**
Perform annual reviews of environmental design of buildings	32%	64%
Review crime reports for previous year	14%	82%
Familiarize students/teachers with student/teacher handbook (n=28)	100%	0%

About one third of the schools perform annual reviews of the environmental design of the school buildings regarding the effects of the designs for violence and safety related purposes. The districts responded with 32% of districts having an environmental review and 64% that do not perform environmental reviews of the school buildings. There is an indication from the districts by an 82% response, that faculty and staff do not know crime reports for the previous year. This could indicate communication with schools, local law enforcement, and other government agencies might need to be an area to be addressed in the districts. Better awareness of the types of crimes occurring in the community could certainly have an affect upon school violence and safety. Evidently,

the schools are educating and informing their students and their faculty about the contents of the handbooks.

In summary, the data shows that the most common actions taken by Region 2 school districts were institution of dress code, presentations by, and presence of, law enforcement officers, and checks of bookbags, lockers, etc. The least common actions were the use of metal detectors, hotlines, and ID badges. The data also reflects that students and teachers are familiar with the student/teacher handbook, but they are not made aware of crime reports for the previous year.

Research Question 3

- **What plans do school districts in Region 2 have in place in the event of an act of violence?**

Table 4 shows the percentage results from the districts' responses about the plans in place for handling violence in the respective districts.

Table 4

Plans in Place for Handling School Violence		
	Yes	**No**
Have an emergency/crisis plan for handling school violence	89%	11%
Annual review of emergency/crisis plan	57%	39%
Written or revised emergency/crisis plan in last 3 years	75%	25%
School campus evaluates the emergency/crisis plan	68%	32%
Law enforcement trained to deal with violence prevention	54%	29%
Faculty/staff know the security and safety-related policies	79%	21%
Students/faculty/staff communicate with administration	100%	0%
(n=28)		

The data collected indicates that 89% of the districts surveyed do have emergency/crisis plans in place for handling school violence; however, only 57% of these schools do an annual review of their plan. The districts did respond with the fact that 75% of the plans were revised in the last three years and each campus does the evaluation of these plans. Of the faculty and staff members, 79% know the security and safety-related policies, 100% of the districts indicated the students, faculty, and staff are familiar with the student and faculty handbooks, and 100% of the faculty and staff members are said to be able to communicate their concerns regarding safety and security to the administration. Also, 54% of the districts indicated that they have law enforcement officials that participate in violence prevention programs to help them deal effectively with and reduce violence.

This data would verify that training is not only provided for teachers and district personnel but the districts are also providing both proactive and reactive training for the law enforcement officers. The districts have emergency/crisis plans in place and review them periodically. The school districts' communicate between campuses concerning their plans, and the personnel are confident and comfortable with communication of their concerns to the administration.

Chapter 5--Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of the study was to examine the procedures that school districts in the Educational Service Center Region 2 have in place to identify threats of violence to school safety and security.

The study contained references that would provide sources for the understanding of the emergency/crisis plans implemented and used, the knowledge levels and training levels of school districts' staff regarding school violence and safety, and violence prevention. From the review of the literature, it is evident that school violence and school safety are issues of vast importance at the local, state, and national levels. Many proactive and violence prevention programs have been initiated due to the increasing occurrence of incidents of violence, not only in urban schools, but in suburban and rural schools across the nation. Violence prevention is very important to school districts across the nation; however, the reactive plans are also of great importance. Crisis management plans are studied, developed, and practiced to react when a crisis occurs. The crisis management plans must be current and responsive to all types of violence and safety issues. Mandatory inclusion of violence prevention plans in schools' campus action plans, as well as mandatory end of the school year reporting of violations of board policies relating to acts of violence are two of the most recent additions to providing a safe learning environment to students and staff. Violence within the school systems does not discriminate along any lines. Violence can happen to upper class, middle class, lower class, minorities, and ethnic students all alike.

The target population was 47 school districts in the Region 2 Education Service Center area. The schools were all located in the south Texas area and were participants in the Safe and Drug Free Schools federal program. The survey was initiated with permission from the area superintendents to survey the school representative. The survey was conducted by a mailed questionnaire with a simple Yes/No format. The survey was completed and returned by 28 of the schools. The data were collected, analyzed, calculated in percentages, and presented in a narrative, tabular format.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were reached based upon data received from the contact persons and from the review of the literature. Planning is of the utmost importance and must include every level of the community. Communication of the plan, from the community to the students, is a vital step in seeing that the plan can be carried out and the chaos and stress kept to a minimum. Administrators must be consistently informed, alert, and proactive in preventing, and, if necessary, in managing crisis incidents. Comprehensive safe school plans must consist of a balance of prevention, intervention, security, and crisis preparedness strategies.

Both the data and the literature show schools are providing violence prevention measures. There is evidence of proactive plans being available, but plans vary in their sufficiency. These plans must be reviewed, revised, and evaluated. As long as there is violence on campuses, schools and communities should be doing more to prevent, or handle school violence. Our school campuses have become areas that include surveillance programs by security and law enforcement officers. Monitoring equipment,

metal detectors, and identification badges have become parts of standard school operations in many school districts. Standardized dress is becoming a proactive solution. Closed campuses help alleviate accessibility to students and staff by unwelcome intruders. Anger management and conflict resolution are components of schools' curriculum. A great deal of the information available on the potential impact of existing violence prevention strategies is unscientific and unreliable. Quality evaluations need to be well designed and adequately financed (DOE and DOJ, 1998). Research must be conducted in order to best protect our students and staff.

As indicated from survey results and the review of literature professional development for staff and law enforcement must be conducted to educate both groups in identifying characteristics of students at risk of performing an act of school violence. Character education, including crisis intervention options, must also be educational opportunities for teachers to learn, and then teach to students. Internalizing that society is placing the responsibility for complete child development upon educators will enable teachers to accept the need for teaching students about rights, responsibilities, and consequences. Incorporating strategies to teach non-violent solutions to conflict will have a positive impact, not only on campus-life, but also on the student's life.

The continual monitoring and adjusting of plans to provide security, both in the form of physical and emotional, real and perceived, is a responsibility schools must provide for students and staff. For example, changes in the population of a campus or the addition or removal of portable buildings are important changes that would require the adjusting of plans for evacuation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were presented.

1. A replicate study of a larger population should be done.
2. A lobby of administration and school officials should be established to promote and seek legislation for the provision of school safety and prevention of school violence.
3. The educational community should strive to promote uniform, safe school procedures to be used across the state. Give the power of the law to the proper authorities to carry out objectively and uniformly the procedures needed to insure the schools in the state are safe and violence free.
4. Universities, and university leaders, should place greater emphasis on course work designed to assist and inform school administration and school personnel about school violence, school violence prevention, policies, and creating effective plans to handle school violence and crisis situations.

After analyzing data and literature there is no doubt that safety in schools will be a priority for schools in the future. School districts should not push the panic button and raise the fear factor to an excessive level. However, school officials must be ever watchful of the early warning signs that to this day have been present in every act of school violence.

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APPENDIX A

Principles to Help Avoid Misinterpretation of
Early Warning Signs of Violence

¨ Do no harm. The early warning signs should not to be used as rationale to exclude, isolate, or punish a child that is troubled.

¨ Understand violence and aggression within a context. Some children may act out if stress becomes too great, if they lack positive coping skills, and if they have learned to react with aggression.

¨ Avoid stereotypes. It is important to be aware of false cues including race, socio-economic status, cognitive or academic ability, or physical appearance.

¨ Understand that children typically exhibit multiple warning signs. Research confirms that most children who are troubled and at risk for aggression exhibit more than one warning sign, repeatedly, and with increasing intensity over time.

APPENDIX B

Early Warning Signs of Violence

¨ Social withdrawal. The withdrawal often stems from feelings of depression, rejection, persecution, unworthiness, and lack of confidence.

¨ Excessive feelings of isolation and being alone. Sometimes these feelings are characteristic of children and youth who may be troubled, withdrawn, or have internal issues that hinder development of social affiliations. However, in some cases feelings of isolation and not having friends are associated with children who behave aggressively and violently.

¨ Excessive feelings of rejection.. Some aggressive children who are rejected by non-aggressive peers seek out aggressive friends who, in turn, reinforce their violent tendencies.

¨ Being a victim of violence. Children who are victims of violence in the community, at school, or at home are sometimes at risk themselves of becoming violent toward themselves or others.

¨ Feelings of being picked on and persecuted. The youth who feels constantly picked on, teased, bullied, singled out for ridicule, and humiliated at home or at school may initially withdraw socially. If not given adequate support in addressing these feelings, some children may vent them in inappropriate ways including possible aggression or violence.

¨ Low school interest and poor academic performance. It is important to assess the emotional and cognitive reasons for the academic performance change to determine the true nature of the problem.

¨ Expression of violence in writings and drawings. Many children produce work about violent themes that for the most part are harmless when taken in context. However, an overrepresentation of violence in writings and drawings that is directed at specific individuals (family members, peers, other adults) consistently over time, may signal emotional problems and the potential for violence. Because there is a real danger in misdiagnosing such a sign, it is important to seek the guidance of a qualified professional to determine its meaning.

¨ Uncontrolled anger. If anger is expressed frequently and intensely in response to minor irritants it may signal potential violent behavior toward self or others.

" Patterns of impulsive and chronic hitting, intimidating, and bullying behaviors. Children often engage in acts of shoving and mild aggression. However, some mildly aggressive behaviors such as constant hitting and bullying of others that occur early in children's lives, if left unattended, might later escalate into more serious behaviors.

" History of discipline problems . These problems may set the stage for the child to violate norms and rules, defy authority, disengage from school, and engage in aggressive behaviors with other children and adults.

" Past history of violent and aggressive behavior. Unless provided with support and counseling, a youth who has a history of aggressive or violent behavior is likely to repeat those behaviors. Aggressive and violent acts may be directed toward other individuals, be expressed in cruelty to animals, or include fire setting. Youth who show an early pattern of antisocial behavior frequently and across multiple settings are particularly at risk for future aggressive and antisocial behavior. Similarly, youth who engage in overt behaviors such as bullying, generalized aggression and defiance, and covert behaviors such as stealing, vandalism, lying, cheating, and fire setting also are at risk for more serious aggressive behavior.

" Intolerance for differences and prejudicial attitudes. An intense prejudice toward others based on racial, ethnic, religious, language, gender, sexual orientation, ability, and physical appearance when coupled with other factors may lead to violent assaults against those who are perceived to be different. Membership in hate groups or the willingness to victimize individuals with disabilities or health problems also should be treated as early warning signs.

" Drug use and alcohol use. Apart from being unhealthy behaviors, drug use and alcohol use reduces self-control and exposes children and youth to violence, either as perpetrators, as victims, or both.

" Affiliation with gangs. Gangs that support anti-social values and behaviors including extortion, intimidation, and acts of violence toward other students cause fear and stress among other students. Youth who are influenced by these groups - those who emulate and copy their behavior, as well as those who become affiliated with them may adopt these values and act in violent or aggressive ways in certain situations. Gang-related violence and turf battles are common occurrences tied to the use of drugs that often result in injury and/or death.

" Inappropriate access to, possession of, and use of firearms. Children and who inappropriately possess or have access to firearms can have an increased risk for violence. Research shows that such youngsters also have a higher probability of becoming victims. Families can reduce inappropriate access and

use by restricting, monitoring, and supervising children's access to firearms and other weapons. Children who have a history of aggression, impulsiveness, or other emotional problems should not have access to firearms and other weapons.

" Serious threats of violence. Idle threats are a common response to frustration. Alternatively, one of the most reliable indicators that a youth is likely to commit a dangerous act toward self or others is a detailed and specific threat to use violence. Recent incidents across the country clearly indicate that threats to commit violence against oneself or others should be taken very seriously. Steps must be taken to understand the nature of these threats and to prevent them from being carried out.

APPENDIX C

- Superintendent's Permission To Survey Letter
- Permission Form
- Safe and Drug-Free Schools Representatives Cover Letter
- Survey Instrument
- Superintendents' Follow-up Permission To Survey Letter
- Follow-up Permission Form

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

College of Education

6300 Ocean Drive, Corpus Christi, Texas 78412

March 1, 2000

Dear

The South Texas Research and Development Center, through Texas A & M University—Corpus Christi and Dr. Tom Linton, conducts research related to educational topics. Three doctoral students, Sandra Herrera, Lana Holland, and Suzanne Wesson are currently seeking your assistance in obtaining information regarding emergency/crisis plans from school districts in the Region 2 area of the Education Service Center.

We are requesting your permission to survey your designated district contact representative for the Education Service Center with Region 2 Safe and Drug-Free Schools Co-op/Non-Co-Op Members for the 1999-2000 school year. Enclosed is a copy of the survey and a letter granting your permission to survey your representative.

Please assist us with our research project. This survey is only being sent to forty-seven districts in Region 2; therefore, your permission is vital for the accurate completion of this project. We are hoping to glean enough information through the compilation of these questionnaires to improve, enhance or reinforce the emergency/crisis plans that currently exist in Region 2. Please take the time to complete and return the permission form by March 15, 2000.

Thank you so much for your help,

Sincerely,

Sandra Herrera

Lana Holland

Suzanne Wesson

Dr. Tom Linton

Enclosures (3)

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

College of Education

6300 Ocean Drive, Corpus Christi, Texas 78412

March 1, 2000

_____ The South Texas Research and Development Center, through Texas A & M-- Corpus Christi has permission to survey the Education Service Center Region 2 Safe and Drug-Free Schools District contact representative regarding an Emergency/Crisis Plan.

_____ The South Texas Research and Development Center, through Texas A & M-- Corpus Christi does not have permission to survey the Education Service Center Region 2 Safe and Drug-Free Schools District contact representative regarding an Emergency/Crisis Plan.

Superintendent's Signature_____

Date:_____

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

College of Education

6300 Ocean Drive, Corpus Christi, Texas 78412

March 15, 2000

Dear :

The South Texas Research and Development Center, through Texas A & M University--Corpus Christi and under the direction of Dr. Thomas Linton, conducts research related to educational topics. Three doctoral students, Sandra Herrera, Lana Holland, and Suzanne Wesson are currently seeking your assistance regarding school districts in the Education Service Center Region 2 area regarding emergency/crisis plans.

Would you please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it in the enclosed stamped envelope. Your response will be used to compile data regarding emergency/crisis plans with a section related to school violence. The identity of you and your school district will not be released or revealed in conjunction with your response.

This survey is only being sent to 47 districts in the Region 2. Your response is critical to this project! Please take the time to complete and return the survey by April 10, 2000.

Thank you so much for your help.

Sincerely,

Lana Holland
Group Representative

Enclosures (2)

SCHOOL SAFETY & SECURITY SURVEY

Your assistance in completing this questionnaire is appreciated.

Name: _____ **District:** _____ **Date:** _____

Darken the response box that best describes the existing emergency/crisis programs and procedures in your district.

	YES	NO
1. Does your district have an emergency/crisis plan for dealing with school violence?	O	O
2. If your district has an emergency/crisis plan with a school violence section, does your district do an annual review of the plan?	O	O
3. If your district has an emergency/crisis plan with a school violence section, has it been written or revised in the last three years?	O	O
4. Does each school campus evaluate the emergency/ crisis plan?	O	O
5. Does your district have law enforcement officers or security guards on any campus? If yes, indicate below: Elementary School: O Law Enforcement O Security Middle School: O Law Enforcement O Security High School: O Law Enforcement O Security	O	O
6. Have your law enforcement officials participated in a violence prevention program to help them deal effectively with or reduce violence?	O	O
7. Is there an annual review of crime prevention efforts regarding environmental design of the school buildings?	O	O
8. Do faculty and staff members know the security and safety-related policies?	O	O
9. Do faculty and staff members know the crime reports for the previous year?	O	O
10. Can students, faculty and staff members communicate safety and security concerns to the administration?	O	O

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	YES	NO
11. Are students, faculty and staff members familiar with the student and teacher handbook?	O	O
12. Have your teachers participated in a violence prevention program to help teachers deal effectively with or reduce violence in schools?	O	O
13. Is there an annual review of student discipline problems, policies, procedures, and practices at local campuses?	O	O
14. Does your district provide instruction for students and teachers in conflict resolution?	O	O
15. Have any of your district's local campuses taken any of the following steps to stop or reduce acts of violence?		
Have visitors such as law enforcement officers talk to classes about crime and violence?	O	O
Has your school instituted a dress code or ban on certain types of clothing?	O	O
Has your campus placed monitors in the hallways?	O	O
Has your campus stationed police officers in or around the school?	O	O
Has your campus made random checks of bookbags, backpacks or lockers?	O	O
Has your campus hired security guards in or around the school?	O	O
Has your campus provided a hot line for students to call?	O	O
Has your campus used handheld metal detectors?	O	O
Has your campus made students walk through metal detectors?	O	O
Has your campus used student/teacher/visitor ID badges?	O	O

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Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

College of Education

6300 Ocean Drive, Corpus Christi, Texas 78412

April 3, 2000

Greetings!

During the week of March 3, 2000 we contacted you by mail requesting permission to survey your Safe Schools Coordinator concerning school violence and emergency crisis plans.

We realize you are very busy. All we need is your signature! Would you please grant us permission by completing the second page of this fax and faxing it to (361) 852-6528.

Your assistance is appreciated. We feel the safety of all students and staff is a priority. Please help us!

Sincerely,

Suzanne Wesson
Doctoral Candidate

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi

College of Education

6300 Ocean Drive, Corpus Christi, Texas 78412

April 3, 2000

_____ The South Texas Research and Development Center, through Texas A & M--Corpus Christi has permission to survey the Education Service Center Region 2 Safe and Drug-Free Schools District contact representative regarding an Emergency/Crisis Plan.

_____ The South Texas Research and Development Center, through Texas A & M--Corpus Christi does not have permission to survey the Education Service Center Region 2 Safe and Drug-Free Schools District contact representative regarding an Emergency/Crisis Plan.

Superintendent's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D

Survey Results

SCHOOL SAFETY & SECURITY SURVEY

1. Does your district have an emergency/crisis plan for dealing with school violence?

   Yes 89% No 11%

2. If your district has an emergency/crisis plan with a school violence section, does your district do an annual review of the plan?

   Yes 57% No 39% N/A 4%

3. If your district has an emergency/crisis plan with a school violence section, has it been written or revised in the last three years?

   Yes 75% No 25%

4. Does each school campus evaluate the emergency/crisis plan?

   Yes 68% No 32%

5. Does your district have law enforcement officers or security guards on any campus?

   Yes 61% No 39%

6. Have your law enforcement officials participated in a violence prevention program to help them deal effectively with or reduce violence?

   Yes 54% No 29% N/A 18%

7. Is there an annual review of crime prevention efforts regarding environmental design of the school buildings?

   Yes 32% No 64% N/A 4%

8. Do faculty and staff members know the security and safety-related policies?

   Yes 79% No 21%

9. Do faculty and staff members know the crime reports for the previous year?

   Yes 14% No 82% N/A 4%

10. Can students, faculty and staff members communicate safety and security concerns to the administration?

    Yes 100% No 0%

11. Are students, faculty and staff members familiar with the student and teacher handbook?

    Yes 100% No 0%

12. Have your teachers participated in a violence prevention program to help teachers deal effectively with or reduce violence in schools?

    Yes 64% No 36%

13. Is there an annual review of student discipline problems, policies, procedures, and practices at local campuses?

    Yes 86% No 14%

14. Does your district provide instruction for students and teachers in conflict resolution?

    Yes 54% No 46%

15. Have any of your district's local campuses taken any of the following steps to stop or reduce acts of violence?

Have visitors such as law enforcement officers talk to classes about crime and violence?

Yes 86% No 11% N/A 3%

Has your school instituted a dress code or ban on certain types of clothing?

Yes 100% No 0%

Has your campus placed monitors in the hallways?

Yes 54% No 46%

Has your campus stationed police officers in or around the school?

Yes 50% No 50%

Has your campus made random checks of bookbags, backpacks or lockers?

Yes 75% No 25%

Has your campus hired security guards in or around the school?

Yes 46% No 54%

Has your campus provided a hot line for students to call?

Yes 11% No 89%

Has your campus used handheld metal detectors?

Yes 21% No 79%

Has your campus made students walk through metal detectors?

Yes 0% No 96% N/A 4%

Has your campus used student/teacher/visitor ID badges?

Yes 39% No 61%